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ABSTRACT

Empathy has been defined as the single most important dimension in establishing a counseling relationship. This paper describes a study that compares counselor trainees' and a general population of African American males' empathy ratings of racially mixed videotaped counseling sessions. The report addresses the following questions: "Do African American males perceive counselors' expressed empathy differently than counselor trainees when viewing counseling sessions between a White counselor and an African American male client?"; "Is there a significant relationship between counselor trainees' perceptions of multicultural counseling competence and ratings of White competence and expressed empathy in a session with an African American male client?"; and "Is there a significant relationship between counselors' use of microcounseling skills and counselor trainees' perception of multicultural counseling competency?" Participants included 11 White counselor trainees aged 22-47 involved in masters level work and 11 African American males ages 24-43 years with no counseling training. Both groups viewed six 15-25 minute videotaped counseling sessions. Findings suggest large differences between counselor trainees' perception of counselors' expressions of empathy and African American males' perceptions of counselor-expressed empathy. A significant relationship existed between counselor trainees' perception of multicultural counseling competency and ratings of counselors' expressed empathy. Due to the differences in ratings between the two groups, the relationship between empathy ratings and perceptions of multicultural counseling competencies require future study. (MKA)

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In Search of Empathy within Multicultural Counseling Process

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In Search of Empathy within

Multicultural Counseling Process

Empathy has been defined as the single most important dimension in establishing a counseling relationship (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1986; Gladstein, 1983; Ivey, 1983). For clients in general, the use of Ivey and Authier's (1978) microcounseling attending and influencing skills has been found to increase levels of perceived empathy (Hearn, 1978, Toukamanian & Rennie, 1975). These skills also have been found to appear preeminently in the factorial structure of empathy (Ivey & Authier, 1978; Zimmer & Anderson, 1968).

In the expression of empathy, particularly with minority clientele (Vontress, 1970; Wittmer, 1971), counselors must be aware of specific group characteristics and experiences (Fukuyama, 1990; Locke, 1990), as well as be aware of how the individual responds to her/his environment. Empathy in these cases must be communicated through cultural role-taking, which involves putting oneself in the role of the client (Scott & Borodovsky, 1990). If a counselor does not recognize the client's cultural background, clients may view the counselor as untrustworthy and lacking credibility (Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994; Sodowsky, 1991).

Counselors' expressed empathy, as perceived by African American clients, has been found to influence clients' return rates better than counselors' years of professional experience (Banks, Barenson, & Carkhuff, 1967). Steward, fetters, & Jackson, & Withrow (1992) found that an African American male client's ratings of counselors' expressed empathy to be significantly correlated with that of a counselor trainee who had received multicultural counseling training, but not with that of a counselor trainee who had not. No significant

relationship was found between the ratings of the multiculturally trained and multiculturally untrained counselor trainees; and, the use of different sets of microcounseling skills contributed to the ratings of the counselor trainee with multicultural training and those of the trainee who had received no training. None of the microcounsleing skills were found to significantly contribute to the variance of the African American male's ratings of empathy. These findings alone give credence to the reexamination of empathy in relationship to African-American clientele, who have been found to self-terminate after initial sessions much more frequently than White counterparts (Acosta, 1980; Cole & Pilarek, 1976). Close examination of the literature results in the identification of a very limited number of studies that specifically examine the differences between counselor trainees' and African American males' perceptions of expressed empathy in a counseling session. Though Fetter's (1992) is the closest to addressing the differences between the two, there were only three participants in the study who rated counselors' expressed empathy across several sessions: the African American male client, a counselor trainee with multicultural counseling training, and a counselor trainee without multicultural counseling training. In addition, this African American male role-playing client was also a doctoral student on a predominantly white campus. Many would agree that this experience is not that which characterizes the lives of most African American men. This study indicates a very important beginning, but the sampling and design could certainly be improved in order to examine the differences between the perceptions of the general population of African American males and those of counselor trainees on the perceptions of expressed empathy within counseling sessions.

To ignore these differences is to ignore the importance of acknowledging that it is clients' perceptions that dictate whether he or she will return for the second counseling session. Believing that empathy for a client has been expressed by a counselor is not sufficient; the client

must also experience this empathy. According to Locke (1990), counselors often forget Roger's sixth condition necessary for counseling: that the client must perceive the counselor's empathic understanding. While Ivey's multicultural competencies are assumed to be necessary for the counseling relationship in the eyes of counseling supervisors, it has not been shown that minority clients experience the positive results of these competencies. Training programs have been developed around these competencies, but it has not been shown that this is the only way to achieve positive therapeutic outcomes with minority clients. It would appear that counselors must not only be able to see empathy in other trainees' use of microcounseling skills, but also be able to express empathy using the microcounsleing skills in a manner that can be seen by members of particular client populations.

Though these are critical findings with important implications for training, such do not add understanding to the perceptions of a general population of potential African American clientele, who often bring unique interpersonal and communication styles to the counseling session (Foster, 1971; Hall, 1976a, 1976b; Toldson & Pasteur, 1976). The African-American male was chosen as a focus for this study due to the same reasons indicated in the Steward, Fetters, & Jackson, & Withrow (1992) study: 1) their current status of being identified as an 'endangered species' (Pederson, 1986; Ponterotto & Casas 1987; Sue, Akutou & Highi; 1985); and, 2) the absence of empirical studies addressing clients' perceptions of the counseling process with this population. However, in this study, African American males within a community were chosen to participate in order to attain a more accurate view of the perceptions of African American males.

The primary purpose of the present study is to compare counselor trainees' and a general population of African American males' empathy ratings in videotaped counseling sessions with

an African-American male 'role-playing' client and volunteer White counselor trainees. The following research questions will be addressed: Do African American males perceive counselors' expressed empathy differently than counselor trainees in viewing counseling sessions between a White counselor and an African American male client? Is there a significant relationship between counselor trainees' perceptions of multicultural counseling competence (as measured by the CCCI-R) and ratings of White counselors' expressed empathy in sessions with an African American male client? Is there a significant relationship between counselors use of microcounsleing skills and counselor trainees' perceptions of multicultural counseling competency? Is there a significant relationship between counselors' use of microcounseling skills and counselor trainees' perceptions of White counselors' expressed empathy in a session with an African American male client? African American males' perceptions?

Method

Participants

Two sets of participants volunteered to be a part of this study. First, 11 counselor trainees, who were first and second year masters students, volunteered to view six 15-25 minute, videotaped, counseling sessions for the purpose of research and to also be better prepared for practicum by reviewing and discussing multiple counseling techniques and strategies used in developing rapport with clients during the first session. The students were currently enrolled in a masters level School and Community Counseling program located in a large, predominantly White, Midwestern, state university. The mean age of this participant set was 27.5 years (range = 22 - 47); 9 were female and 2 male; 8 were White American, 2 Asian, and 1 African American.

The second set of participants were 11 African American males who had no training in counseling. This set of participants did not complete the CCCI-R (Hernandez & LaFromboise,

1985; LaFromboise, Coleman, and Hernandez, 1991) given the nature of the questions being more appropriate to those related to the counseling field or to the literature addressing culture. The mean age of this participants set was 29 years (range = 24 - 43). All of these participants had graduated from high school; four had some college; two had an undergraduate degree; and one had a masters degree. All were employed and married.

The Counseling Sessions

Each of the six counseling sessions consisted of a counselor-client dyad that consisted of a white counselor and an African American male client. The videotapes used were the same tapes used in the Steward, Fetters, Jackson, & Withrow (1992) study. The client was approximately 25 years old, neatly dressed, articulate, and well-groomed. The client was a doctoral student who volunteered to serve as a client who was struggling with racism within his work environment. His feelings of frustration were beginning to effect other areas of his life. His presenting problem was the same with each of the seven counselors.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were the counselor trainees' and the African American males' ratings of empathy (0 - 9) and the counselor trainees' CCCI-R scores (Cross-cultural Counseling Inventory--Revised; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991). The CCCI-R assesses respondents' perceptions of a counselor's cultural competence and is based on the counseling competencies identified in the 1980 report of the Education and Training Committee of Division 17 of the American Psychological Association (D.W. Sue et a., 1982). The CCCI-R contains 20 items focusing on counselor interview behavior. Respondents rate items on a 6-point bipolar scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). LaFromboise et al (1991) reported coefficient alpha values for the CCCI-R of .78 and .95 in two separate studies. they also found

support for the content validity of the instrument by documenting 80% rater agreement between items of the CCCI-R and the counseling competencies identified by D.W. Sue et al., on which the items were based. Additional support for the content validity of the CCCI-R has been provided by Pomales et al (1986) and Gim et al. (1991), both of which found that counselors in a culturally responsive role were rated significantly higher on the CCCI-R than counselors in a culturally unresponsive role.

Procedure

At the convenience of the participants, tape reviewing sessions were scheduled with counselor trainees and community members meeting separately. Participants were provided with the definition of empathy; rated each of the videotaped sessions on a scale of 0 (least empathic) to 9 (most empathic); briefly stated observations that influenced the empathy rating; and, completed a Cross-cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised Form for each (counselor trainees only). After the viewing of all videotapes, each participant completed a Ratings of Client Scale that measured the respondents perceptions of the client This measure presents a series of traits and respondents are requested to rate this client on each of the traits by circling the number closest to what they think best describes the client's current level of functioning.. Discussion of tapes among participants did not occur until after the last session was viewed.

Typewritten transcripts were made of each of the six videotaped sessions and counselor responses categorized according to the following microcounseling skills: open-ended questions; closed ended questions; minimal encouragers; attention to affect; paraphrasing; summary; directions; reflections; use of self, identify assumptions; and other.

Data Analysis

T-test analyses were used to compare the means across counselor trainees and African American male participants for each of the videotapes reviewed. Pearson product correlation analyses were used in order to examine the relationship between counselor responses in the videotapes as indicated by Ivey and Authier's microcounsleing skill categories and counselor trainees' and the African American male ratings of empathy. Additional correlations will be performed in order to examine the relationship between counselor responses in the videotapes to the counselor trainees' CCCI-R total scores and ratings of empathy.

Results

Table 1 presents the African American males' and counselor trainees' ratings of empathy on each of the six videotapes viewed. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, ranges, and results of t-tests comparing the ratings between the two groups on each of the tapes. Significant differences were found between group ratings on tapes #1 ($t = 3.86$; $p = .002$), #3 ($t = -4.24$; $p = .000$), and #4 ($t = -6.21$; $p = .000$), however, group differences were not found on tapes #2 ($t = 1.44$; $p = .16$), #5 ($t = .32$; $p = .75$), or #6 ($t = -1.66$; $p = .11$).

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the counselor-trainees' CCCI-R ratings of each of the videotapes viewed. Tape #2 received the highest score (mean = 90.77; standard deviation = 13.86); Tape #3 received the lowest score (mean = 46.66; standard deviation = 6.91). T-test results comparing each of the pairs of CCCI-R scores associated with each of the six tapes indicated that only tape #3 was found to be significantly ($p < .05$) different when compared to each of the others. Tape #3 was found to be significantly lower than all other tape ratings, whereas no significant differences were found between the scores between each of the other videotapes.

Table 4 presents the overall perceptions of the client in the videotape by both the counselor trainees and the African American male sample. Of the nineteen client traits addressed, African American males and counselor trainees agreed on nine characteristics being associated with the client and disagreed on 10. In general, the African American male perceptions tended toward traits that were more neutral or negative on the traits in which there was disagreement. However, when ratings were compared on each of the traits on which there was agreement, African American males' ratings most often indicated higher numbers than counselor trainees on the positive traits.

African American males in this study reported neutral reactions to the client on warm-cold, healthy-sick, reliable-unreliable, employable-unemployable, and promising future-unpromising future. Counselor trainees in this study reported neutral reactions to the client on happy-sad, tense-relaxed. However, the African American males' ratings indicated a perception of the client as sad, bad, tense, hard to get along with, and dangerous, which contrasted with counselors' trainees perceptions of good, easy to get along with, and not dangerous. Readers must once again note that the numbers on the rating scale indicated that African American males' perceptions tended to be more positive than counselor trainees on those traits that they perceived as positive.

In discussion with the African American males after the viewing, it was clear that there was much more concern about the current emotional status of the client than even the most empathic counselors seemed to understand. The statement that best characterized the group perception of the client was: "He was really in trouble and the counselors just didn't seem to get it. This brother was talking about messing up everything that he had worked for, and he had worked for a lot, and he needed respect and appreciation for the horrible racist situation,

understanding, and help and guidance right then. Not all of the counselors seemed to realize this." A few of these participants also noted the counselors' attire and personal presentation that seemed less professional than they would have thought appropriate for the role. For example, one reviewer indicated that one counselor's crossed and constantly moving leg was a distraction and seemed to minimize the seriousness of the circumstances. One of these reviewers questioned why the 'client' was so surprised about 'racism' at such a late date in life.

Table 5 presents the client's ratings of and comments about perceived expressed empathy by counselor-trainees. Readers must note that these are the ratings of counselors' expressed empathy of the client in the videotapes (Steward, Fetters, Jackson, & Withrow, 1992) and not the ratings of the African American males who viewed and rated the videotapes in this study.

Table 6 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis that has the CCCI-R scores as the dependent variable and the use of the microcounsleing skills as the independent variables. Although the overall model was not found to significantly predict CCCI-R ratings, the use of attention to affect and open ended questions were found to significantly and negatively associated with counselor trainees' CCCI-R scores ($B = -4.07$; $p = .04$).

Counselor trainees' ratings of counselors' expressed empathy were found to be significantly correlated with CCCI-R scores ($r = .97$; $p = .001$). Significant and negative Pearson product correlations were found between counselors' use of open ended questions and attention to affect and counselor trainees' CCCI-R scores ($r = -.88$; $p = .001$) and Empathy ratings ($r = -.85$; $p = .03$). As in the Steward, et al (1992) study, none of the microcounsleing skills were found to be significantly correlated with the African American males' ratings of counselors' expressed empathy.

Discussion

First, findings from this study suggest that there are significant differences between counselor trainees' perceptions of counselor expressed empathy and African American males' perceptions of counselor expressed empathy. As in the Steward et al (1992) study, it appears that counselors' cues for identifying empathy (i.e., the number of open ended questions and the use of attention to affect) are also somewhat different from those of African American males (empirically unidentified in this study). These results support the importance of practitioners' providing opportunities for clients' evaluations of counselors' effectiveness during initial sessions. Another recommendation is for counselors' to encourage clients within initial sessions to identify counselor responses or nonverbals that they believe are not useful or respectful in the eyes of the client. To best prepare counselor trainees, counselor educators must assist trainees in developing a comfort with being challenged and questioned given the comments of the 'client' and those of the African American men in this study.

Second, a significant relationship was found between counselor trainees' perceptions of multicultural counseling competency (CCCI-R) and ratings of counselors' expressed empathy. It appears that multicultural counseling competency and expressed empathy are almost synonymous in the eyes of these trainees to which abuse of open ended questions and attention to affect appears to be significantly related.

However, due to the differences in ratings between the African American males and the counselor trainees' responses, the relationship between empathy ratings and perceptions of multicultural counseling competence remains unexplained for the African American males in this study. Though the initial intent was to have African American males complete the CCCI-R, some of the participants were confused by the language and/or didn't know what indicators would exhibit the skills assessed by the measure. Consequently, the relationship between the

CCCI-R scores and the ratings of counselor perceived empathy was not examined in this study. In addition, what counselors did that exactly influenced the ratings of the African American male participants was also not empirically examined in this study. However, through the conversations that occurred after the viewings, it appeared that counselors' responses that indicated that the client's presenting problem was taken seriously enough to move toward problem resolution were key. What these participants attended to might have been more of 'how' the counselor was (nonverbals) and not necessarily 'what' the counselor said. In addition, the African American males might have also been attending to the client's response to each of the counselors. An interaction effect might have been observed by these participants that were not empirically examined by this study. This interaction effect and cues provided by the 'client' in the tape might also have been much more apparent and salient to the African American men than to the counselor trainees. This might explain why the African American males' ratings on positive sessions were rated higher and ratings on negative sessions were rated lower than those of counselor trainees.

Third, it is critical to note the differences in perception of traits of the client. Though there was some overlap, there were also differences in how counselor trainees perceived the client and how African American males perceived the client. Were the counselor trainees working too hard to alleviate their anxiety in the cross-cultural interaction addressing the volatile issues of racism, that they missed the heightened frustration of the client? Given that all of the counselor trainees who viewed the videotapes had completed at least one course in multicultural counseling and/or issues addressing diversity, could these training experiences have resulted in a more positive skew that might have blinded them to the reality of the client's experience? Were these trainees more apt to see positive attributes when the African American men were more

comfortable with neutral and responses indicating a stance of reserving judgment until additional information? Is there just as much a danger in counselor trainees seeing positive when there are neutral and/or negative cues as there is in seeing negative attributes where there are positive and neutral cues? Further investigation is certainly warranted.

Though the researchers believe that these findings are important and add significantly to the literature, there some limitations that must be noted. First, the generalizability of the findings may certainly be limited by the small sample size and the fact that data collection occurred only in one training sight and in one community. Second, the sample of counselor trainees was predominantly female and predominantly white. The response might have been very different from a sample with a different composition. The same may be true for the African American male sample. If the researchers had controlled for level of education or current social economic status, the outcome might have been altered considerably. Nevertheless, the point that readers must attend to is that there is a need for counselors to become more introspective about issues of race and to attend to clients' perceptions of counseling effectiveness. The same might be true for supervisor in the evaluation of trainees' effectiveness. Part of the feedback process should include client evaluation as well as supervisor evaluation during early training experiences. Leaving out either of these might mislead the trainee into a false sense of competency, whereas combining both would provide a more comprehensive picture of the 'interaction' effect that occurs in all counseling relationships. Future research is strongly suggested.

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Table 1.

Ratings of Perceived Expressed Empathy Ratings of Counselors (Co) (n = 11) and Client Population (Cl) (n = 11)

Tape 1		Tape 2		Tape 3		Tape 4		Tape 5		Tape 6	
Cl	Co	Cl	Co	Cl	Co	Cl	Co	Cl	Co	Cl	Co
7	4	8	7	2	2	2	8	9	6	3	8
7	6	8	6	2	2	2	3	5	7	7	4
7	5	8	6	1	3	3	4	5	4	5	5
8	5	7	6	1	3	2	5	8	5	4	7
6	6	7	6	1	1	2	4	6	5	6	7
7	5	8	8	1	3	2	5	5	6	6	4
7	4	8	7	2	2	3	7	6	6	6	5
7	5	7	8	2	3	2	5	5	7	5	6
8	7	9	9	1	3	3	8	8	7	4	7
7	8	8	8	1	3	2	6	6	8	5	7
7	6	7	8	1	2	2	5	5	5	4	5

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test results comparing Counselor Trainees' (n = 11) and African American males' ratings (n = 11) of counselors' expressed empathy on each videotaped viewed.

	African American Males	Counsleing Trainees	t	p
Tape #1	7.09	5.54	3.86	.002
	.54	1.21		
Tape #2	7.72	7.18	1.43	.166
	.64	1.07		
Tape #3	1.36	2.45	-4.24	.000
	.50	.68		
Tape #4	2.27	5.45	-6.07	.000
	.46	1.63		
Tape #5	6.18	6.00	.32	.753
	1.47	1.18		
Tape #6	5.00	5.90	-1.66	.11
	1.18	1,37		

Table 3.

Counselor Trainees CCCI-R Scores by each Videotape

Tape 1	Tape 2	Tape 3	Tape 4	Tape 5	Tape 6
75	86	61	68	71	69
89	97	46	90	83	98
81	64	49	72	77	88
75	99	48	77	93	73
57	74	47	79	88	85
64	104	47	89	90	90
100	103	47	101	96	91
93	100	38	93	100	95
78	90	37	78	70	71
Mean: 79.11	90.77	46.66	83.00	85.33	84.44
S.D. 13.61	13.86	6.91	10.79	10.79	10.79

Note. Two participants (counselor-trainees) did not complete this measure.

Table 4.

Overall Perceptions of Client by both Counselor Trainees and Clientele Population

Trait Perception of Clientele Population	Trait Perception of Counselor Trainees
Attractive	Attractive
Cooperative	Cooperative
Energetic	Energetic
Neutral Warm or Cold	**Warm**
Sad	**Neutral Happy or Sad**
Strong	Strong
Bad	**Good**
Tense	**Neutral Tense or Relaxed**
Not Neurotic	Not Neurotic
Hard to get along with	**Easy to get along with**
Intelligent	Intelligent
Neutral Healthy or Sick	**Healthy**
Neutral Reliable or Unreliable	**Reliable**
Neat	Neat
Emotional	Emotional
Dangerous	**Not Dangerous**
Independent	Independent
Neutral Employable or Unemployable	**Employable**
Neutral Promising or Unpromising Future	**Promising Future**

Table 5.

Client's ratings of and comments about perceived expressed empathy by counselor-trainees (Steward, Fetters, Jackson, Withrow, 1992).

Videotape	Client's Ratings	Comments
1	7	Seemed interested; tried to understand; restated the problem; tried to tap into the issues; wanted to help me; offered solutions.
2	8	Used correct term "African American"; listened closely; tried to relate personal women issues; worked to understand; made me feel like I was in control.
3	2	Came off as cold; repeated issues but not really trying to understand; seemed unnerved; very distant; wasn't listening.
4	2	Tried to show interest; fake, minimized problems; didn't connect at all; mimicked me (only repeated words).
5	9	Listened well, very relaxed, tried to help find a solution; kind; looked interested felt connected; shared herself (self-disclosed).
6	3	Didn't say much; felt like I just talked.

Table 6.

Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis with CCCI-R scores as the dependent variables and the use of microcounseling skills as the independent variable.

Variables	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Attention to Affect and open ended questions	-4.07	.87	-.98	-4.64	.04
Reflections and Summaries	.14	.90	.03	.16	.88
Paraphrase, Directives, and Minimal Encouragers	1.46	.81	.37	1.79	.21
(Constant)	95.24	9.57		9.94	.01